

WEST VIRGINIA LEGISLATURE

2026 REGULAR SESSION

Introduced

Senate Bill 886

By Senators Hamilton, Deeds, Martin, Phillips,

Thorne, and Woodrum

[Introduced February 9, 2026; referred
to the Committee on Natural Resources]

1 A BILL to amend and reenact §20-3-5 and §20-3-5a of the Code of West Virginia, 1931, as
 2 amended, relating to forests and wildlife areas; updating the prescribed fire program; and
 3 including when persons are permitted to use the controlled application of fire on private
 4 lands without a burning permit.

Be it enacted by the Legislature of West Virginia:

ARTICLE 3. FORESTS AND WILDLIFE AREAS.

1 **§20-3-5. Forest fire seasons; prohibited and permissible fires; burning permits and fees;**
 2 **fire control measures; criminal and civil penalties.**

1 (a) Forest fire seasons. — March 1 through May 31, and October 1 through December 31
 2 are designated as forest fire seasons. During any fire season, a person may set on fire or cause to
 3 be set on fire any forest land, or any grass, grain, stubble, slash, debris, or other inflammable
 4 materials only between 5 p.m. and 7 a.m., at which time the fire must be extinguished.

5 (b) Permissible fires during forest fire seasons. — The following attended fires are
 6 permitted during forest fire season as set forth in subsection (a) of this section without a burning
 7 permit unless there is a burning ban in effect:

8 (1) Small fires set for the purpose of food preparation, or providing light or warmth around
 9 which all grass, brush, stubble, or other debris has been removed for a distance of 10 feet from the
 10 fire; ~~and~~

11 (2) Burning conducted at any time when the ground surrounding the burning site is covered
 12 by one inch or more of snow; and

13 (3) Prescribed fires, set by the owner or occupier on private property, when following
 14 procedures prescribed by §20-3-5a of this code.

15 (c) Burning permits. — The director or his or her designee may issue burning permits
 16 authorizing fires during forest fire seasons as set forth in subsection (a) of this section that are
 17 otherwise prohibited by this section. The permits shall state the requisite conditions and time
 18 frame to prevent danger from the fire to life or property: *Provided*, That the director or his or her

19 designee shall take final action upon all completed permit applications within 30 days of receipt if
20 the application is uncontested, or within 90 days if the application is contested.

21 (1) Permit fees. — Entities required to pay a permit fee are those engaged in commercial,
22 manufacturing, public utility, mining, and like activities. Agricultural activities are exempt from
23 paying the permit fee. The permit fee is \$125 per site and shall be deposited into the Division of
24 Forestry Fund (3081) to be used to administer the provisions of this section. The permit fee covers
25 the fire season during which it is issued.

26 (2) Noncompliance with any condition of the permit is a violation of this section. Any permit
27 which was obtained through willful misrepresentation is invalid and violates this section.

28 (3) Permit holders shall take all necessary and adequate precautions to confine and
29 control fires authorized by the permit. Failure to take action is a violation of this section and is
30 justification for the director to revoke the permit.

31 (d) Fire control. —

32 (1) With approval of the Governor, the director may prohibit the starting of and require the
33 extinguishment of fire in any designated area, including fires permitted by this section.

34 (2) With approval of the Governor, the director may designate any forest area as a danger
35 area, prohibit entry, and declare conditional uses and prohibited areas of the forest by
36 proclamation at any time of the year. The proclamation shall be furnished to newspapers, radio
37 stations, and television stations that serve the designated area and becomes effective after 24
38 hours. The proclamation remains in effect until the director, with the approval of the Governor,
39 terminates it. The order shall designate the time of termination, and notice of the order shall be
40 furnished to each newspaper, radio station, and television station that received a copy of the
41 proclamation.

42 (3) A person shall remove all flammable material from the area immediately surrounding
43 the material to be burned for a distance which ensures the fire will at all times be contained; this
44 safety strip shall in no event be less than 10 feet wide. Any person or his or her agent or employee

45 who sets or causes to be set any fire which escapes the safety strip and causes damage to the
46 lands of another is guilty of a misdemeanor.

47 (e) Criminal and civil penalties. — A person or entity that violates this section is guilty of a
48 misdemeanor and, upon conviction, shall be fined not less than \$100 and not more than \$1,000 for
49 each violation. In addition to fines and costs, a person or entity convicted of a violation of this
50 section shall pay a \$200 civil penalty to the division within 60 days. The civil penalty shall be
51 collected by the court in which the person is convicted and forwarded to the division and deposited
52 in the Division of Forestry Fund (3081) to be used to administer the provisions of this section.

53 **§20-3-5a. Prescribed Fire Program.**

1 (a) As used in this section:

2 (1) "Certified prescribed fire manager" means an employee of the Division of Forestry, the
3 Division of Natural Resources, or any federal employee who has successfully completed a
4 certification process established by the director.

5 (2) "Prescribed fire" means the controlled application of fire or wildland fuels in wildlife
6 management areas, state forests or federal lands, or on private property in either the natural or
7 modified state, under specified environmental conditions, which allows the fire to be confined to a
8 predetermined area and produces the fire behavior and fire characteristics necessary to attain
9 planned fire treatment and ecological, silvicultural, and wildlife management objectives.

10 (3) "Prescription" means a written statement defining the objectives to be attained by a
11 prescribed fire and the conditions of temperature, humidity, wind direction and speed, fuel
12 moisture, and soil moisture under which a fire will be allowed to burn. A prescription is generally
13 expressed as an acceptable range of the prescription elements.

14 (b) Director certification process. — The director shall develop and administer a
15 certification process and prescribed burn course for any individual who desires to become a
16 certified prescribed fire manager. The prescribed fire course shall include the following subjects:
17 the legal aspects of prescribed fire, fire behavior, prescribed fire tactics, smoke management,

18 environmental effects, plan preparation, and safety. The director shall give a final examination on
19 these subjects to all attendees. The director may charge a reasonable fee to cover the costs of the
20 prescribed fire course and the examination.

21 (c) To be certified as a certified prescribed fire manager, a person shall:

22 (1) Successfully complete all components of the prescribed fire course developed by the
23 director and pass the examination developed for the course;

24 (2) Successfully complete a prescribed fire course comparable to that developed by the
25 director and pass the examination developed for the course; or

26 (3) Demonstrate relevant past experience, complete a review course and pass the
27 examination developed for the prescribed fire course.

28 (d) Prescribed burning shall be performed in the following manner:

29 (1) A certified prescribed fire manager shall prepare a prescription for the prescribed fire
30 prior to the burn. The prescription shall include: (A) The landowner's name, address, and
31 telephone number, and the telephone number of the certified prescribed fire manager who
32 prepared the plan; (B) A description of the area to be burned, a map of the area to be burned, the
33 objectives of the prescribed fire, and the desired weather conditions or parameters; (C) A
34 summary of the methods to be used to start, control, and extinguish the prescribed fire; and (D) A
35 smoke management plan. The smoke management plan shall conform to the Department of
36 Environmental Protection's rule, Control of Air Pollution from Combustion of Refuse, 45 CSR 6. A
37 copy of the prescription shall be retained at the site throughout the period of the burning;

38 (2) A certified prescribed fire manager shall directly supervise a prescribed fire and ensure
39 that the prescribed fire is in accordance with the prescription; and

40 (3) The certified prescribed fire manager shall notify the nearest regional office of the
41 division 24 hours prior to the prescribed fire.

42 (e) If the actions of any certified prescribed fire manager or the prescriptions prepared by
43 him or her violate any provision of this article, state air pollution control laws, the Division of

44 Forestry rules, the Department of Environmental Protection rules or laws, or threaten public health
45 and safety, the director may revoke his or her certification.

46 (f) The director shall propose rules for promulgation in accordance with the provisions of
47 §29A-3-1 *et seq.* of this code for establishing the procedures for the development of a certification
48 program for prescribed fire managers and for prescribed fire control on private property.

NOTE: The purpose of this bill is to allow prescribed fire control on private property without a burning permit.

Strike-throughs indicate language that would be stricken from a heading or the present law and underscoring indicates new language that would be added.